

WASHINGTON, D.C. --- Today, Members of Congress from the Pacific Northwest will send a letter to the Secretary of the Air Force, James G. Roche, reiterating their opposition to the Air Force's proposal to transfer the 939th Rescue Wing. The 939th is located on the Portland Air Base at Portland International Airport and was instrumental in the rescue on Mt. Hood last week.

The letter expresses concern that this change would put citizens throughout the Pacific Northwest at undue risk and requests an urgent meeting with the Secretary to discuss last week's tragic accident. The following Members of Congress signed the letter: Senators Wyden, Smith, Murray, Cantwell and Reps. Blumenauer, DeFazio, Hooley, Walden, Wu and Baird.

Rep. Earl Blumenauer remarked, "I want to thank the Washington and Oregon delegations for coming together to request a discussion with the Secretary of the Air Force on their plans to relocate this successful and vital component of the Northwest's emergency response system. The dramatic events on Mount Hood last week, coupled with the huge increase in military spending this year warrant a revisiting of the Air Force's plans to relocate the 939th Rescue Wing. Surely at a time when some here in Congress would spend billions on outdated, unnecessary new weapons systems, we should be able to use a small portion of the defense budget to maintain life-saving programs like the 939th Rescue Wing."

"Losing the 939th Rescue Wing would be a real blow to Oregon and the entire Pacific Northwest," said Senator Wyden. "Events have shown the critical need we have for the first-class search-and-rescue protection this unit provides to citizens in trouble. I appreciate Earl's leadership on this matter, and look forward to working with him and the rest of the delegation on turning this around."

Senator Gordon Smith said, "The 939th Air Wing has been an integral part of our state's search and rescue efforts and is responsible for saving the lives of hundreds of disaster victims over the years--not to mention hikers, skiers, and sailors. If anything, the events of last week show that Oregon needs a rapid response search and rescue team now more than ever."

"It's imperative that we keep the 939th Rescue Wing in Portland," said Rep. DeFazio. "Lives depend on it. The 939th provides a vital service to those who recreate and make their living on Oregon's mountains, high desert and on the Pacific Ocean."

"The problem is that the Air Force is more focused on the machinery in the 939th than the men and women that maintain it, the crews who fly it, or the individuals who have saved lives around up and down our coast," said Rep. Hooley. "Unfortunately, when our taxpayers are done paying millions of dollars to train new replacements to use the 939th's equipment in some other part of America, they won't have the record of success amassed both here and abroad. We've lobbied hard to ensure that point isn't lost on the Administration."

"The men and women of the 939th Rescue Wing play a critical public safety role for the people of Oregon," said Rep. Greg Walden. "The heroism they displayed during last week's tragic accident on Mt. Hood underscores in a way that words never could just how much Oregonians depend on their service. I'm hopeful that we can develop a solution that will enable the 939th to remain in Oregon, and I look forward to working with my Oregon colleagues toward that end."

Rep. David Wu said, "I have long worked with the rest of the Oregon delegation to keep the 939th Rescue Wing here in Oregon. Hiking, mountain climbing and skiing are mainstays of our tourism industry, and people must be able to enjoy these activities with the secure knowledge that should disaster strike, help is near. The 939th is a tremendous resource to our country and to Oregon. The Pacific Northwest is vulnerable to virtually every natural disaster --from earthquakes to wildfires, volcanic eruptions, floods and tornados, we've got it. Moving the unit clear across the country but leaving these highly-trained reservists in Oregon would clearly diminish the Air Force's ability to carry out missions in the near future."

"The 939th Rescue Wing provides a valuable and essential service to the Northwest. The Air Force made its decision to pull out the 939th before the massive increases to our defense funding that came after 9/11. In light of the recent dramatic rescue attempt the 939th made on Mt. Hood, I believe the Air Force needs to reconsider its decision," said Rep. Brian Baird.